

# **Fifth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships**

A summary of the local impact  
evidence to date for the Office for  
Students

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For more information about this report

Please contact:

**Lindsey Bowes, Research Director**

CFE Research  
Phoenix Yard, Upper Brown Street  
Leicester, LE1 5TE

0116 229 3300  
lindsey.bowes@cfe.org.uk  
[www.cfe.org.uk](http://www.cfe.org.uk)

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# Executive summary

Uni Connect is a national programme funded by the Office for Students (OfS). It aims to reduce the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups by equipping young people to make informed choices and minimising barriers, including those relating to academic attainment. In the current phase of the programme, 29 university-led partnerships are being funded to deliver targeted support to young people in Years 9 to 13 who live in areas where participation in higher education is lower than expected and address ‘cold spots’ so that any school can engage with outreach and attainment raising activities.

## The national impact evaluation of Uni Connect

A further aim of Uni Connect is to strengthen evaluation practice within the sector and contribute to a stronger evidence base around ‘what works’ to increase progression to higher education. The national impact evaluation helps to achieve this aim by measuring changes in intermediate outcomes that are associated with increased progression to higher education in the longer term, including learners’ knowledge of and attitudes towards higher education, subject knowledge and study skills, and interpersonal skills such as motivation and self-confidence. Changes in these outcomes have been measured at a national level through a longitudinal learner survey and at a local level through partnerships’ own impact evaluations, since 2017.

CFE regularly collates and analyses the evaluation evidence produced by partnerships for the national impact evaluation. Partnerships can submit evidence for review at any time, but most is shared in response to formal calls.<sup>1</sup> This report has been produced following the most recent (fifth) call for evidence, which ran from June to October 2022. The primary focus is on new evidence that corroborates or challenges previous analyses. This report also draws on the cumulative evidence base to provide insights and a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the different interventions delivered through the programme.

## Approach to the evidence review

Evidence submitted by the partnerships is assessed for relevance and coded for quality and strength based on the criteria set out in the OfS’s Standards of Evidence<sup>2</sup> and by the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) (see Annex 1). Partnerships provide evidence on the impact of their activities, which include multi-intervention (‘black box’) approaches, subject masterclasses, skills and attainment workshops, mentoring, summer schools,

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<sup>1</sup> The first four calls for evidence were conducted in April 2019, March 2020, January 2021, and August 2021. [The associated reports](#) are available on the OfS’s website.

<sup>2</sup> See OfS (2019) ‘Access and participation standards of evidence’, available at [Standards of evidence and evaluating impact of outreach](#).

information, advice and guidance (IAG), and campus visits, as well as on the impact of activities targeted at parents and carers and school/college staff. Impact is measured against key outcomes, which are set out in the national evaluation framework.

### **The characteristics of the evidence base**

To date, 314 sources of evidence have been independently reviewed by CFE. The majority of these (271) are 'empirical', that is based on primary quantitative or mixed-methods research, which identifies **associations** between Uni Connect activities and outcomes for learners. There is little 'causal' evidence (14), which compares the outcomes of learners who have taken part in Uni Connect with the outcomes of a similar group in order to **attribute** impact to the programme. Evidence on the impact of multi-intervention approaches, summer schools and IAG is currently among the most robust – of the 105 sources of evidence on the impact of multi-intervention approaches, 39 are rated as 'strong empirical' or 'causal'. However, the strength of the evidence for most interventions has increased over time. As a result, the Evidence Bank now contains a high volume of material to demonstrate which interventions delivered by partnerships are effective for achieving the different outcomes, and the extent to which they are likely to increase progression to higher education for under-represented groups in the longer term. This represents a significant step towards the achievement of the OfS's objective to enhance the evidence base through Uni Connect.

### **Evidence submitted in the fifth call**

A total of 83 sources of evidence submitted in response to the latest call have been reviewed and provide the basis for the new insights in this report. Almost all these sources are 'empirical' (81) and more than a third are rated as 'strong'. For this reason, the latest call represents the most robust body of evidence received to date. Three-quarters of the new sources of evidence report positive findings overall, and all except two demonstrate that individual activities have a positive impact on one or more of the outcomes measured.<sup>3</sup> This adds weight to the existing body of evidence that Uni Connect is delivering benefits for learners, and helps to further develop our understanding of the impact and effectiveness of individual interventions, particularly multi-intervention approaches (38 new sources). Although this insight is particularly pertinent for the future development of Uni Connect, it is also relevant to those working in access and participation within higher education providers more broadly.

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<sup>3</sup> Previous calls for evidence had lower proportions of positive outcomes and higher proportions of 'no impact' or 'too early to say'.

## Key findings

### Impact on outcomes

- Uni Connect is succeeding in its aim to support learners to make informed decisions about their future education options. The latest evidence builds on earlier findings to further demonstrate that all intervention types delivered and evaluated by partnerships<sup>4</sup> can contribute to increased **knowledge of the higher education offer** and the **benefits of higher education** – essential insight for learners when deciding if higher education is the best option for them.
- An assumption that underpins the rationale for the interventions that are delivered through Uni Connect is that developing learners' interpersonal skills, attributes and self-belief can help to increase rates of progression to higher education. The cumulative evidence suggests that most of the of interventions delivered and evaluated by partnerships can have a positive impact on some skills and attributes, particularly **self-confidence, resilience, problem solving** and **communication skills**.
- Uni Connect partnerships are placing more emphasis on **attainment raising** as an enabler of progression to higher education, and this will be a requirement from September 2023. Current limited evidence on the impact of Uni Connect on attainment provides mixed results. There are some strong empirical studies that show some interventions can have an impact on learners' **grades**, and others that suggest engagement can improve a learner's **motivation** to achieve and a **willingness to engage** with their schoolwork, which in turn can lead to higher attainment.
- Previous evidence submitted by partnerships presented a mixed picture of the impact of Uni Connect on learners' **intentions to apply to higher education**. The latest analysis provides more positive evidence; it demonstrates that sustained and progressive support through Uni Connect is effective for increasing the **likelihood that a learner will apply to higher education** and could also have a positive impact on the **number of applications** in the longer term.

### Impact of individual interventions

#### Multi-intervention approaches

- Much of the new evidence reviewed from this fifth call adds further weight to existing findings that multi-intervention approaches have a positive impact on several outcomes for learners, including **knowledge of the higher education offer** and **how to apply, confidence in their ability to make informed choices**, and the **likelihood of applying to higher education** in the future.

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<sup>4</sup> The interventions evaluated in the fifth call for evidence are: campus visits, IAG, mentoring, multi-intervention approaches, skills and attainment workshops, subject masterclasses and summer schools. Activities not evaluated in the evidence submitted in this round are parent activities and staff development activities.

- Although there is evidence to suggest that this approach has a positive effect on learners' **interpersonal skills**, evidence of its impact on **subject knowledge**, **study skills** and **attainment** is more mixed.
- There remains limited evidence on the **relative effectiveness of the different elements** of a multi-intervention approach, but additional evidence of a link between the **number of sessions** engaged in and positive outcomes has been submitted. Two pieces of strong empirical evaluation demonstrate that higher levels of engagement in a multi-intervention programme can enhance **attainment** and the number **applications to higher education**.

### Summer schools

- Just two new empirical sources on the impact of summer schools were submitted in response to the latest call. They provide further evidence that summer schools have positive effects on learners' **knowledge of higher education**, including its **benefits**, what **student life** is like and the **financial support** available. This in turn can enhance their **ability to make informed choices** and lead to a positive shift in learners' **intentions towards higher education**. These sources also provide further evidence to suggest that summer schools support participants to develop their **interpersonal skills and attributes**, particularly **confidence** and **self-efficacy**.

### IAG

- A substantial volume of new evidence on the impact of IAG was submitted in response to the latest call. It provides further evidence that this intervention, like summer schools, can have a positive impact on learners' **knowledge of higher education**, including the provision on **offer**, the **benefits**, what **student life** is like and **how to apply**. This knowledge enhances learners' **ability to make informed choices** and has a positive influence on their **intentions towards higher education**.
- Additional impacts of IAG are identified. Three new average empirical studies suggest that IAG supports the development of some learners' **interpersonal skills**, **subject knowledge** and **study skills**, particularly when the sessions are focused on a specific industry or issue that impacts on their ability to study (e.g. mental health awareness and support).

### Subject masterclasses and skills and attainment workshops

- Evidence on the impact of masterclasses and workshops was previously combined. It suggested that these interventions can have a positive effect on the development of learners' **interpersonal skills**. The latest evidence suggests that it is **skills and attainments workshops**, rather than subject masterclasses, that are more likely to enhance learners' **interpersonal skills**, particularly **motivation** and **self-confidence**.
- **Subject masterclasses**, on the other hand, are more likely to impact learners' **subject knowledge**, **confidence to make informed choices** and their **intentions towards higher education**. Although previous combined evidence on masterclasses and workshops suggested that they contribute to attainment

raising and the development of knowledge of higher education, student life and financial support, none of the new evidence examines impact on these outcomes.

## Mentoring

- There is cumulative evidence that mentoring, irrespective of mode of delivery, can have a positive effect on learners' **interpersonal skills**, particularly their **self-confidence, resilience, and coping skills**. One new strong empirical study found that learners improved their ability to **work in teams** and enhanced their **communication skills** through a mentoring intervention.
- Earlier evidence suggested that online mentoring could be less impactful than face-to-face mentoring. The evidence submitted in this call shows online/blended mentoring generally has a positive effect on several outcomes including **confidence to make informed choices**, which adds to the existing strong body of evidence.
- Previous evidence demonstrates the potential impact of mentoring on **attainment** through the development of learners' **subject knowledge** and **written communication skills**. However, none of the new sources evaluated the link between mentoring and attainment raising. None of the new studies examined the impact of mentoring on learners' **intentions towards higher education** either, so the evidence remains mixed.

## Campus visits

- The cumulative evidence suggests that campus visits can have a positive impact on learners' **knowledge of higher education** as well as their perceptions about whether **higher education is for 'people like me'**. Three new studies demonstrate that campus visits can also have a positive effect on learners' **intentions towards higher education**. Qualitative feedback from participants emphasises the importance of delivering campus visits face-to-face. This approach is perceived to more effectively 'bring higher education to life' for young people, than online or blended methods.

## Interventions for parents and carers and staff development

- Evidence on the impact of Uni Connect activities for parents/carers and school/college staff remains limited. Therefore, it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the impact that these interventions have on their target audiences or learners at present.

## Recommendations

Based on our analysis of the additional evidence received in response to this call and existing knowledge of 'what works', it is recommended that partnerships:

- Continue to deliver sustained and progressive support to under-represented groups through coherent multi-intervention approaches. The evidence shows that multi-intervention approaches are most effective for achieving short-, medium- and long-term outcomes, although further evidence on the 'best mix' of interventions is required.



- Regularly engage with young people to maximise the impact of Uni Connect. Overall level of engagement, rather than the number of different types of intervention engaged in, appears to be associated with more positive outcomes. More evidence is required to understand the optimum level of engagement needed to inform future planning and delivery.
- Prioritise in-person campus visits, summer schools and face-to-face mentoring (including as part of a blended approach) to maximise impact on learners' knowledge and intentions towards higher education.
- Combine masterclasses and workshops with IAG to increase learner motivation and equip them with the subject knowledge, skills and attributes to support attainment raising in the longer term.

Through their local evaluation, it is recommended that partnerships:

- Continue to prioritise the analysis of the impacts of interventions on different sub-groups to understand the differences and needs and to establish the optimum 'mix' of activities as part of a sustained and coherent programme.
- Evaluate the 'dosage effect'<sup>5</sup> to establish the optimum number of hours and types of interventions required to achieve positive outcomes. Currently there is not enough evidence to say with certainty how many sessions of each type of activity are needed to produce a positive effect.
- Further explore how attitudinal and motivational factors influence learners' attainment and intentions towards higher education at different stages of their educational journey, to ensure interventions such as workshops and masterclasses are appropriately tailored and have impact.
- Consider how national administrative data could be used to develop robust methods for evaluating the impact of Uni Connect on attainment raising.
- Continue to track learners to establish whether positive impacts are sustained in the longer term and lead to progression to higher education.
- Continue to implement pre- and post-intervention data collection, and experimental and quasi-experimental methods where appropriate, to further strengthen the evidence base and establish impact that can be attributed to an intervention.

Although these recommendations are primarily targeted at Uni Connect partnerships to help them enhance delivery and further strengthen the evidence base on 'what works', the learning and insight are also relevant to wider stakeholders in the access and participation sector. Furthermore, wider stakeholders can now access the Evidence Bank that has been collated over five years on the effectiveness of different interventions and their impact on outcomes for learners. It is, therefore, recommended that stakeholders use this evidence to inform their strategic and operational approaches to access and participation. In particular, higher education

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<sup>5</sup> The 'dosage effect' refers to the amount of outreach an individual experiences and the impact that has on their outcomes.

providers should draw on the evidence to identify interventions that are most likely to achieve the outcomes required to address institutional priorities for access and participation and inform the development of access and participation plans in the context of the proposed new risk-based approach. Insight from the Evidence Bank should also be used to support knowledge exchange between partnerships and institutions on best practice in access and participation.

## Introduction

Uni Connect is a national programme, funded by the Office for Students (OfS), that supports 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners across England. The four aims of Uni Connect are currently to:

- Contribute to reducing the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.
- Equip young and adult learners from underrepresented groups to make an informed choice about their options in relation to the full range of routes into and through higher education and to minimise the barriers they may face when choosing the option that will unlock their potential, including barriers relating to academic attainment.
- Support a strategic local infrastructure of universities, colleges and other partners that can cut through competitive barriers, offer an efficient and low-burden route for schools and colleges to engage with higher education outreach, enable schools to engage with attainment raising activity, and address outreach ‘cold spots’ for underrepresented groups.
- Contribute to a stronger evidence base around ‘what works’ in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice across the sector.<sup>6</sup>

Uni Connect partnerships work to achieve these aims by delivering a range of activities designed to help learners develop the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to make well-informed decisions about their future education and realise their long-term career ambitions. A greater emphasis will be placed on delivering attainment raising activity over the course of Phase three,<sup>7</sup> given the link between educational attainment and progression to higher education. Although the guidance on attainment raising and the associated funding stream does not come into effect until September 2023, a number of partnerships have started to evaluate the impact of their activities on levels of attainment, and this evidence is included in this review.

This report is the latest in a series of outputs by CFE exploring the impact of Uni Connect.<sup>8</sup> It has been produced following the fifth call for partnerships’ evaluation evidence, which ran from June to October 2022. Although the focus is on new insight from the most recent evidence, it contains a synthesis of the evidence submitted since the outset of the programme on the impact of the range of outreach activities being delivered through Uni Connect. The findings are intended to inform the ongoing planning and delivery of Uni Connect, and the work of the wider access and participation sector. Areas for further research in the field are also identified.

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<sup>6</sup> Aims set out on [the Uni Connect section](#) of the OfS website.

<sup>7</sup> Phase three of Uni Connect will run from 1 August 2021 to 31 July 2025. The attainment raising activity and associated funding stream will commence in September 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Further information on the evaluation of Uni Connect and the previous reports published by the national evaluation team are available on [the Uni Connect section](#) of the OfS’s website.

## Understanding the impact of Uni Connect

The OfS is striving to strengthen evaluation practice within the sector and enhance the evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach. It is working to achieve these outcomes through programmes such as Uni Connect and other initiatives, such as the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO).<sup>9</sup> The proposed new OfS approach to regulating access and participation in higher education is focusing on mitigating risks to equality of opportunity.

Since the outset of Uni Connect, there has been a focus on understanding the effectiveness and impact of the programme at a local and national level. CFE, in its role as the independent national evaluator, has collated and reviewed partnerships' evaluation evidence to understand the impact of activities at a programme level. In addition, CFE has administered five waves<sup>10</sup> of a longitudinal survey tracking changes in learners' knowledge, attitudes and intentions towards higher education and the extent to which they can be attributed to Uni Connect.

Underpinning the national evaluation of Uni Connect is a Theory of Change. The Theory of Change summarises the inputs and activities that are necessary to achieve intermediate outcomes that will lead to increased progression to higher education among under-represented groups in the long term. An indicator bank of key metrics<sup>11</sup> for these outcomes accompanies the Theory of Change and has helped guide the development of the framework for the review of partnerships' local evaluation evidence. The initial focus for Uni Connect was to provide high-quality, impartial information, advice and guidance on the benefits and realities of university. Uni Connect initially sought to engage young people living in target areas with the capability and potential aspiration to go into higher education; for this reason, raising attainment was not an explicit outcome. As the programme has evolved, a greater emphasis has been placed on raising attainment amongst under-represented groups to support their increased progression to higher education, and from the academic year 2023-24, partnerships will be expected to deliver a new strand of attainment raising activity. In response to the latest call for evidence, some partnerships have submitted evidence that considers the impact of outreach interventions on attainment and/or outcomes, such as increased motivation, subject knowledge and study skills, that can lead to improved attainment. This evidence is included in our review.

## The meta-review of local evaluation evidence

Each partnership is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of its Uni Connect activities at the local level. Partnerships have been expected to share their

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<sup>9</sup> TASO is an affiliate What Works Centre funded by the OfS through an initial grant until 2023.

<sup>10</sup> The five survey waves were administered as follows: Baseline (Wave 0) – 2017-18; Wave 1 – 2018-19; Wave 2 – 2019-20; Wave 3 – 2020-21; Wave 4 – 2021-22.

<sup>11</sup> Indicator banks contain the metrics that will be used to measure whether the outcomes set out in the Theory of Change have been achieved along with the research methods (e.g. learner survey) that will be used to collect the required data.

evidence with CFE throughout the programme and via five formal calls for evidence conducted in April 2019,<sup>12</sup> March 2020,<sup>13</sup> January 2021,<sup>14</sup> August 2021<sup>15</sup> and October 2022. Partnerships can share their own reports based on their evaluation findings, or complete a template which requests all the information required by CFE to fully assess its quality and strength.

After each call, CFE analyses and synthesises the evidence to provide a fuller understanding of the impact of different interventions on a range of outcomes for learners. Partnerships' activities are categorised within the programme as:

- multi-intervention approaches, sometimes referred to as 'black box' interventions
- subject masterclasses
- skills and attainment workshops
- mentoring
- summer schools
- information, advice and guidance (IAG)
- campus visits
- parents and carers
- staff development.

In previous evidence calls, subject masterclasses and skills and attainment workshops were categorised together. In this report, the two activity types have been separated, reflecting their slightly different purposes and intended outcomes. Subject masterclasses involve activities designed to provide an insight into subjects at higher education. In contrast, skills and attainment workshops are activities with a clear aim to increase knowledge, skills and understanding (e.g. supporting students with their specific school curriculum or development of interpersonal skills).<sup>16</sup> Drawing on the evidence, CFE offers recommendations designed to support programme development. Findings are also used to support the interpretation of the longitudinal learner survey findings. Feedback to partnerships on ways to further strengthen their evaluation evidence is provided at both an individual and programme level to help build capability.

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<sup>12</sup> The findings are published in the [End of Phase One report](#).

<sup>13</sup> The findings are published in [An independent review of the evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect Partnerships](#).

<sup>14</sup> The findings are published in the [Third independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect Partnerships](#).

<sup>15</sup> The findings are published in the [Fourth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect Partnerships](#).

<sup>16</sup> In this current review, these activities have been categorised as skills and attainment workshops, but after the implementation of the attainment raising plans in September 2023, activities may be classified differently, based on new [specific guidelines](#) on attainment raising activities and how these fit within a defined delivery element of a programme.

## The review process

All sources of evidence submitted by partnerships are screened against the criteria in Table 1. Those that fall outside the scope of the review are excluded at this stage.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

| ✓ Included in the evidence review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | ✗ Out of scope for the evidence review                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Submissions with a focus on the <b>impact</b> of individual outreach interventions or programmes of activity on outcomes for Uni Connect learners.</li> <li>– <b>Quantitative and/or qualitative</b> evidence of impact.</li> <li>– Evidence that an outreach intervention or programme has had a <b>positive impact, negative impact, or no effect.</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Submissions with a focus on the effectiveness of <b>systems and processes</b> associated with the delivery of Uni Connect, such as student or teacher feedback on what they liked/disliked about an activity, what worked well and what could be improved.</li> <li>– Submissions with a focus on <b>operational issues</b>, e.g. the effectiveness of governance arrangements or partnership members and collaborative working practices</li> </ul> |

A total of **26** partnerships submitted **136** sources of evidence in response to the latest call. Of these, **44** were screened out during the initial sift because they did not meet one or more of the inclusion criteria or were duplicate reports or pieces of evidence. The remaining **91** submissions were reviewed in more detail and a further **nine** were screened out at this stage. A total of **83** sources of evidence have been added to the Evidence Bank as a result of the latest call.<sup>17</sup>

The 83 sources of evidence are assessed and categorised as either ‘Type 1 – Narrative’, ‘Type 2 – Empirical Enquiry’ or ‘Type 3 – Causal’ using the Standards of Evidence<sup>18</sup> (see Table 11 in Annex 1 for further details). The number of the different types of evidence reviewed at each call is summarised in **Error! Reference source not found.** overleaf.

<sup>17</sup> The Uni Connect [Evidence Bank](#) is available to download from the OfS website and is a database resource that details nearly all the evidence submissions reviewed across the five different calls for evidence. It is designed for partnerships to explore the evidence of what works for achieving specific outcomes.

<sup>18</sup> See OfS (2019) ‘Access and participation standards of evidence’, available at [Standards of evidence and evaluating impact of outreach](#).

Table 2: Classification of the evidence submitted

| Number and type of evidence sources submitted at each formal call |                 |          |          |          |          |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|
|                                                                   | Apr 2019        | Mar 2020 | Jan 2021 | Aug 2021 | Oct 2022 | TOTAL      |
| Type 1 – narrative                                                | 15              | 4        | 6        | 6        | 1        | <b>32</b>  |
| Type 2 – empirical                                                | 23              | 46       | 62       | 59       | 81       | <b>271</b> |
| Type 3 – causal                                                   | 5 <sup>19</sup> | 2        | 2        | 4        | 1        | <b>14</b>  |

Each output is reviewed and coded using a framework based on criteria developed by TASO to identify the key features of the evaluation, including the research questions and the outcomes being measured, sample size relative to the population participating in the activity and the methodological approach, along with the key findings and any evidence of impact – positive or negative (see Annex 1 for further details).

The overall rating of the quality of the evidence considers the type of evidence as well as the strength of the evaluation design.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of the national evaluation is to establish the impact of Uni Connect on outcomes for learners; therefore well-designed and executed evaluations that demonstrate a causal relationship between the intervention and outcomes achieved are considered the highest quality evidence. The coding of evidence emphasises that strong causal evidence is of the highest quality, and weak narrative the lowest quality (Figure 1). Within this report, different types of evidence of equivalent quality are represented by the same colour (e.g. average empirical and strong narrative). Within the reporting of evidence submitted, priority is given to higher quality submissions, particularly stronger empirical and causal evidence. All the results of the different calls for evidence are recorded in an Evidence Bank.

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<sup>19</sup> This includes papers based on three randomised control trials undertaken as part of the national evaluation with support from the Behavioural Insights Team.

<sup>20</sup> 'Strength' refers to the strength of the evaluation design, taking account of the methods the evaluation team has used to collect the data and conduct their analyses. Strength does not explicitly relate to the strength, level or type (positive/negative) of impact achieved.

Figure 1: Assessing the quality of evidence

|                  |           |                             |              |              |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    | Light Yellow                | Light Green  | Dark Green   |
|                  | Empirical | Light Orange                | Light Yellow | Light Green  |
|                  | Narrative | Grey                        | Light Orange | Light Yellow |
|                  |           | Weaker                      | Average      | Stronger     |
|                  |           | <b>Strength of evidence</b> |              |              |

## Synthesis of evidence

The evidence on the impact of individual Uni Connect-funded activities<sup>21</sup> on short-, medium- and long-term learner outcomes is synthesised in the next section. The number of pieces of evidence of each type and strength for each intervention is presented in a series of figures; the number in brackets in these figures indicates the number of new pieces of evidence submitted in response to the latest call.

Details of the extent and nature of the impact of each intervention are synthesised in a series of tables ordered from strongest to weakest evidence. The summary for each intervention focuses on where the evidence submitted in response to the latest call corroborates and adds weight to previous analyses as well as where it offers new insights and a more nuanced understanding of impact. Evidence that challenges earlier findings is also highlighted. The strength and type of evidence on which the findings are based is noted (e.g. ‘average empirical’ denotes an empirical evaluation of average strength) to provide an indication of the level of confidence it is possible to have in the findings and conclusions drawn.

As a result of the evidence submitted in response to the latest call, further insights into the impacts of sustained outreach on learners’ outcomes and the effectiveness of some individual interventions are now available. But there remains an important note of caution – the evidence is still largely empirical and therefore **indicative** of impact; it is not possible to claim that the outcomes achieved are **attributable** (that is, caused by) the interventions in the majority of cases. However, given the challenges of isolating the effects of Uni Connect activity at the local and programme levels, confidence in the findings increases as the weight of evidence that Uni Connect is having a positive effect grows.

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<sup>21</sup> A map of the evidence of outcomes by intervention is presented in Annex 2.



# Synthesis of evidence

## Multi-intervention approaches

A multi-intervention approach, sometimes referred to as a 'black box' intervention, combines two or more activities into an ongoing programme of support for the same cohort of learners.

Figure 2: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of multi-intervention approaches (number of new sources in parentheses).

| Type of evidence | Strength of evidence |         |          |
|------------------|----------------------|---------|----------|
|                  | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
| Causal           |                      | 4(1)    | 2        |
| Empirical        | 20(2)                | 35(15)  | 33(19)   |
| Narrative        | 3(1)                 | 2       | 6        |

- The majority of new evidence assessed the impact of multi-intervention approaches.
- Nearly all submissions were empirical, and the majority were average or stronger in terms of quality.
- Evidence on multi-intervention approaches remains the highest in terms of volume and it is the strongest and most robust.

## Key findings and new insights

- Across the 38 sources of evidence that were submitted and coded as multi-intervention in this round, 27 report positive impact and 10 report mixed effects. Only one source reports negative impact, and this was a small-scale empirical study of eight participants.
- The additional evidence in this call further supports and extends the strong body of evidence that a multi-intervention approach has a positive impact on learners' **interpersonal skills**, their confidence in their **ability to make informed choices** and their **knowledge of the higher education offer** and **how to apply**.
- There is further evidence that multi-intervention approaches can have a positive impact on learners' **intentions** towards and **likelihood of applying to higher education**. The majority of evidence indicating that Uni Connect has a positive impact on intentions to apply is strong empirical. The one causal study shows that multi-intervention approaches increase perceived likelihood of applying for university (while simultaneously reducing the perceived likelihood of choosing an apprenticeship route).
- The evidence on the impact of multi-intervention approaches on learners' **subject knowledge**, **study skills** and **attainment** is mixed. Of the 11 studies that

evaluated the impact on attainment, six are positive, four are mixed, and one shows no impact.

- While the evidence overall is strong and robust, there remains limited evidence on the **relative effectiveness of the specific elements** that form the overall design of the multi-intervention approach. Understanding which combination of individual activities are most effective for a given outcome would allow partnerships to select the most appropriate combination of activities for their target audience and specific needs.
- As previously reported, there may be evidence of a link between the **number of sessions** a learner engages with and positive outcomes. Two pieces of strong empirical evaluation demonstrate that higher levels of engagement through a multi-intervention can produce positive impacts relating to **applications to higher education and attainment**.

Table 3: Evidence of the impact of multi-intervention approaches

| Short-term outcomes                                                                   | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased knowledge of the higher education offer and how to apply                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– All previous evidence submitted demonstrated a <b>positive</b> shift in learners’ knowledge of the higher education offer. Submissions in this latest call typically follow this trend, although a small number of studies report <b>mixed</b> results. These tend to be based on younger learners, or show a decline based on elevated pre-test self-reported measures.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Increased knowledge of the benefits of higher education                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– There is further strong evidence that engaging in multi-intervention approaches can produce a <b>positive</b> shift in learners’ knowledge of the benefits of higher education. Some studies differentiate between Uni Connect and non-Uni Connect learners. One strong empirical report highlights that Uni Connect learners are less likely to know about higher education compared to non-Uni Connect learners, emphasising the importance of targeting interventions to develop the knowledge of this group.</li> </ul>                                                    |
| Increased knowledge of student life, including increased knowledge of student finance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Six new pieces of evidence suggest that multi-intervention approaches can have a <b>positive</b> effect on learners’ knowledge of student life. Ten new pieces of evidence also suggest that multi-intervention approaches can lead to a <b>positive</b> shift in knowledge of the cost of higher education and student finance. These reports highlight that pre-intervention knowledge is typically low, so improvements in this aspect are likely.</li> </ul>                                                                                                               |
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The body of evidence on the impact of multi-intervention approaches on learners’ ability to make informed choices has been significantly strengthened, with 20 new submissions evaluating this outcome. The majority of these (16, including seven strong empirical) identify a <b>positive</b> effect on learners’ confidence to make informed decisions. One strong empirical evaluation also reports a statistically significant <b>increase</b> in learners’ knowledge about where to find information about higher education to enhance their decision-making.</li> </ul> |

| Development of interpersonal skills and attributes              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Key interpersonal skills developed through multi-intervention approaches include confidence, self-esteem, motivation and resilience. One strong empirical source demonstrates a link between self-esteem and academic self-concept, suggesting that improving self-esteem could help to raise attainment and intentions towards higher education.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Development of subject knowledge/study skills                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Evidence evaluating multi-intervention approaches continue to demonstrate a <b>positive</b> impact on subject knowledge and study skills. Evidence from three strong empirical sources found statistically significant findings that their interventions had improved learners' research, communication and presentation skills. One source provides <b>mixed</b> evidence relating to learners' revision skills – students in Year 9 reported no impact for this, while Year 10 students had improved most in this area.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Attainment raising                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Eleven new studies consider the impact of multi-intervention approaches on attainment. Much of the evidence relates to impact on learners' motivation to work hard and achieve 'good' grades, as it is not possible to measure impact on grades achieved in the short term. This evidence suggests that multi-intervention approaches can <b>positively</b> influence behavioural factors that have the potential to lead to higher attainment.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Medium-term outcomes      Impacts achieved                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to higher education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The majority of evidence submitted in this call demonstrates that multi-intervention approaches have a <b>positive</b> impact on learners' intentions to apply to higher education (18 out of 20 sources). Most sources demonstrate that following the intervention, a higher proportion of learners are considering applying to higher education. One strong empirical source finds that each additional contact hour is positively associated with intentions to apply to higher education.</li> <li>– Just one source (strong empirical) identifies <b>no statistically significant differences</b> in learners' intentions to apply to higher education and another reports a <b>negative</b> impact. However, this is based on a small sample from which two perceive that they are less likely to apply.</li> </ul> |
| Longer-term outcomes      Impacts achieved                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Increase in applications/offers/acceptances at higher education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Four new sources suggest that consistent engagement with multi-intervention approaches has a <b>positive</b> impact on applications to higher education and the likelihood of receiving an offer. This is consistent with the existing evidence base.</li> <li>– One average empirical study finds that six interventions between Year 9 and Year 13 doubles the number of learners who apply to higher education when compared to learners who only receive one outreach intervention. A further strong empirical source provides statistically-significant findings to demonstrate that learners who are engaged with outreach programmes are 1.3 times <b>more likely</b> to progress to higher education.</li> </ul>                                                                                                  |

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- |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The findings of one strong empirical study suggests that between five and six hours of outreach activities is the optimal amount of contact time to <b>increase</b> application rates to higher education.</li></ul> |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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## Summer schools

These consist of two or more days of intensive activity aimed at providing a real insight into university life and all that it entails. They include Easter schools and can be residential or non-residential.

Figure 3: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of summer schools (number of new sources in parentheses).

|                  |           |                      |         |          |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|----------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    |                      | 3       | 1        |
|                  | Empirical | 5                    | 13      | 4(2)     |
|                  | Narrative | 3                    | 4       |          |
|                  |           | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
|                  |           | Strength of evidence |         |          |

- Despite the end to COVID-19 restrictions, which affected the delivery of summer schools and the associated evaluation, just two new pieces of strong empirical evidence were submitted in response to this call.
- Evidence on the impact of summer schools is still among the most robust, second to only multi-intervention approaches.

## Key findings and new insights

- The empirical evidence submitted in the latest call mainly focuses on the short-term outcomes of summer schools, reflecting the trend in previous calls.
- Although neither of the two new sources evaluate the impact on applications to higher education and/or offers, they provide evidence of a positive shift in learners' **intentions towards** or **likelihood of applying to higher education**.
- All the evidence submitted to date supports the assertion that summer schools have positive effects on learners' knowledge of higher education, including **the benefits of higher education** and **knowledge of student life** and **financial support**.
- There is further evidence that summer schools have a positive impact on learners' **ability to make informed choices** and on the development of **interpersonal skills and attributes**, particularly **confidence** and **self-efficacy**.

Table 4: Evidence of the impact of summer schools

| Short-term outcomes                                             | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased knowledge of the benefits of higher education         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The two new strong empirical studies report that summer schools have a <b>positive</b> impact on learners’ knowledge of student life, the benefits of higher education and student finance. This corroborates the findings of empirical studies submitted in previous calls.</li> <li>– The latest evidence triangulates the findings from pre/post surveys and focus groups to demonstrate an <b>increase</b> in learners’ knowledge of the benefits of higher education: 96% and 93% of participants agreed that they were aware of the benefits of higher education following a summer school, up from 78% and 80% respectively.</li> </ul> |
| Increased knowledge of student life                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Both new sources of evidence report a <b>positive</b> shift in the proportion of students agreeing with the statement ‘I know what student life would be like’ following the intervention (one reports that the proportion of learners agreeing with this statement increased from 22% to 96%).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Increased knowledge of the cost of higher education             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– One of the new empirical studies reports that prior to the summer school, none of the participants had knowledge of student finance. After the intervention, 78% agreed that they ‘now understood how student finance works and the support available’.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Contrary to the findings from one average empirical study in the fourth call for evidence, which shows a decrease in learners’ confidence to make decisions, both new sources of evidence demonstrate a <b>positive</b> impact. The proportion of learners who agreed with the statement ‘I feel confident in taking decisions about my career path’ increased from 33% to 78% post-intervention.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Development of interpersonal skills and attributes              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Both new studies triangulate survey results with qualitative insights from learner journals and focus groups to demonstrate that summer schools can <b>increase</b> self-confidence and self-efficacy, corroborating existing evidence. The studies report <b>positive</b> shifts in agreement with the statements ‘I feel confident that I have the skills needed to study at Uni’ and ‘I generally feel confident in myself.’</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Medium-term outcomes                                            | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to higher education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– In contrast with existing evidence from previous calls for evidence, including a phase 1 randomised control trial, the new evidence suggests that summer schools have the potential to <b>increase</b> the likelihood of a learner applying to higher education by boosting their confidence in their ability to study at a higher level. Both studies submitted in the latest call report an increase in the proportion of learners who agreed with the statement ‘I feel confident I can make the change from school</li> </ul>                                                                                                              |

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p>to higher education in the future.’ Differences in the characteristics of the participants, summer school content and research methods are likely to explain why these new studies drew different conclusions to the existing evidence.</p> |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## Information, advice and guidance (IAG)

This refers to light touch events for students, usually lasting a day or less, which tend to involve university staff visiting schools or colleges to give information and advice about university life, how to apply, course choices and student finance. Such events can also include fairs and exhibitions. They can be broadly subject specific and aimed at a group or an open audience with limited interaction.

Figure 4: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of IAG (number of new sources in parentheses).

|                  |           |                      |         |          |
|------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|----------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    |                      | 3       |          |
|                  | Empirical | 20(2)                | 25(9)   | 5(3)     |
|                  | Narrative | 2                    | 4       |          |
|                  |           | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
|                  |           | Strength of evidence |         |          |

- The evidence on the impact of IAG has been strengthened by the addition of 12 empirical studies of average or stronger quality.
- As a result, evidence on the impact of IAG is amongst the strongest for all activities.

## Key findings and new insights

- Of the 14 new pieces of evidence submitted in relation to IAG, 13 identify a **positive** impact and one demonstrates some **mixed** evidence.
- There is further evidence that IAG has a positive impact on **knowledge of higher education** (including knowledge of the offer and how to apply, student life, and the benefits), learners' **ability to make informed choices** and their **intentions to apply to higher education**.
- Some positive impacts of IAG that have not been identified in previous calls are reported. These appear to be secondary impacts – an indirect outcome from learners being involved in the intervention. Three average empirical studies suggest that IAG developed some learners' **interpersonal skills**. A further three average empirical studies report positive effects on elements of learners' **subject knowledge** and **study skills**, particularly when the IAG session is focused on a specific area (e.g. careers and skills needed for the animation industry) or an issue that impacts on a learner's ability to study (e.g. mental health awareness and support).
- Interventions delivered face-to-face or through a blended approach tend to result in positive outcomes.



Table 5: Evidence of the impact of information, advice and guidance activities

| Short-term outcomes                                                | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased knowledge of the higher education offer and how to apply | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Five new studies provide evidence that learners’ knowledge of the higher education offer and how to apply <b>increases</b> as a result of IAG. One piece of strong empirical evidence reports an increase of 29.9% in the proportion of learners that understood the different types of higher education. This is in contrast with one weak empirical study that found IAG can have a <b>negative</b> effect on learners’ knowledge.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                  |
| Increased knowledge of the benefits of higher education            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– There is qualitative evidence of the <b>positive</b> effects that tutorials in particular can have on learners’ awareness of higher education and confidence in their associated knowledge.</li> <li>– Of the three new studies that examine the impact of IAG on knowledge of the benefits of higher education, two report <b>positive</b> impacts and one <b>mixed</b> impact.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Increased knowledge of student life                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Two strong empirical sources triangulate quantitative and qualitative findings to show learners’ knowledge about student life in general <b>increases</b> following IAG.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Increased knowledge of the cost of higher education                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Two new sources evaluate the impact of IAG on learners’ knowledge of student finance. One average empirical study reports that 86% of learners ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ they were <b>confident</b> about how they would manage their money at university after the intervention. Another identifies that learners struggle to retain information about financial support, suggesting the impact of IAG on their knowledge may not be sustained without further intervention.</li> </ul>                                                                     |
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Previous calls for evidence have documented the <b>benefits</b> of IAG for improving learners’ ability to make informed choices. Ten new sources report <b>positive</b> outcomes in support of previous findings.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Development of interpersonal skills and attributes                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Three new pieces of evidence indicate that participating in IAG sessions can indirectly <b>support</b> the development of softer skills including self-confidence, interpersonal and study skills. One average empirical study suggests that receiving IAG can help learners understand revision and time management techniques in addition to the primary aim of exploring progression routes into higher education. This adds to the evidence that IAG is most effective when it is subject specific and relevant to learners’ needs and interests.</li> </ul> |
| Development of subject knowledge/study skills                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– One average empirical study reports an <b>increase</b> from 25% to 61% in subject knowledge following a subject specific IAG session.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

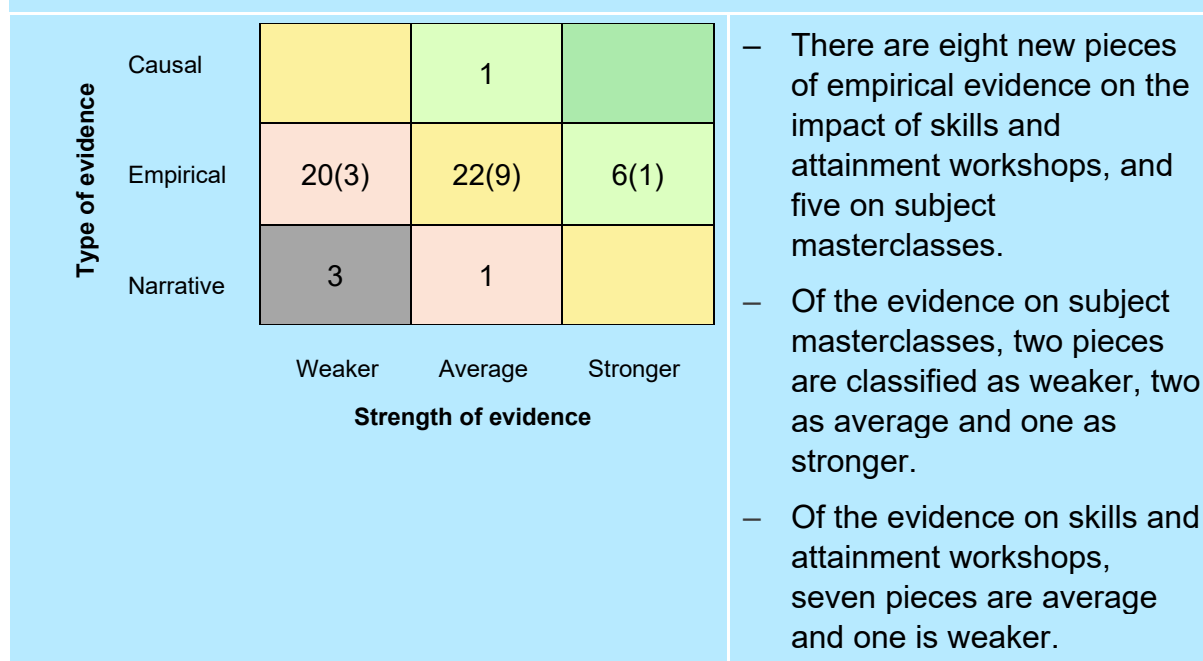
| Medium-term outcomes                                            | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to higher education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Six new pieces of evidence demonstrate <b>positive</b> shifts in learners' intentions to apply to higher education after IAG interventions. One strong empirical study reports that the percentage of learners with a definite intention to progress to higher education increased from 47% to 58% over the course of a year. This adds to the evidence from empirical studies submitted in the previous call that showed some positive change.</li> </ul> |

## Subject masterclasses and skills and attainment workshops

A subject masterclass is an activity designed to provide an insight to one or more subjects, or to increase awareness of one or more subjects in higher education. It can be part of a structured, subject-specific event. Skills and attainment workshops are activities designed to increase knowledge, skills and understanding. Workshops have a clear aim and can be used to help, for instance, students with their specific school curriculum, contribute to increasing attainment, or personal development.

In this round of evidence, the analysis of subject masterclasses has been separated from skills and attainment workshops as these have a different focus. In Figure 5, the combined evidence is presented from across all five calls for evidence, before summarising the evidence from the most recent submission separately.

Figure 5: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of skills and attainment workshops and subject masterclasses (number of new sources in parentheses).



### Key findings and new insights on the impact of subject masterclasses

- The majority of the new evidence (four sources) documents the positive impact of subject masterclasses across a variety of short- and medium-term outcomes. One study (average empirical) reports no impact, mainly because learners reported a high level of knowledge prior to engaging with the intervention.
- The latest evidence about subject masterclasses shows that they can have a positive impact on learners' **subject knowledge, confidence to make informed choices** and their **intentions to apply to higher education**. Previously, combined evidence on masterclasses and workshops demonstrated a positive impact on **the development of interpersonal skills and attributes**. There is little evidence from the five new sources on the impact of subject masterclasses that

relates to interpersonal skills; thus the evidence suggests that skills and attainment workshops are better placed to achieve this outcome.

- One strong empirical study demonstrates that subject masterclasses **increased subject knowledge** for over 95% of Year 9 and 10 learners, with the average increase in knowledge being 33% to 40% for these year groups. Knowledge also increased for 69% of Year 11 learners, and 70% of Year 11 learners said they planned to go to university.

Table 6: Evidence of the impact of subject masterclasses

| Short-term outcomes                                             | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices        | – Two new sources of evidence demonstrate that subject masterclasses can have a <b>positive</b> effect on learners' confidence to make informed choices. These sources identify that the information provided during masterclasses enables learners to decide whether higher education is for them. This strengthens the existing body of evidence of the impact of subject masterclasses on decision making. |
| Development of interpersonal skills and attributes              | – There is <b>limited</b> evidence to suggest that masterclasses can positively impact on interpersonal skills and attributes. Only one new source (average empirical) reports that learners developed personal skills, although the description of the type of personal skills developed is vague.                                                                                                           |
| Development of subject knowledge/study skills                   | – Three sources of evidence demonstrate that learners <b>increased</b> their subject knowledge as a result of a masterclass. In one average empirical source, nearly two-thirds of learners (63%) reported that they obtained skills or knowledge that they had not learned at school/college.                                                                                                                |
| Attainment raising                                              | – Previously, combined evidence on masterclasses and workshops suggested they contribute to attainment raising and the development of knowledge of higher education, student life and financial support. None of the new evidence examines the impact of subject masterclasses on these outcomes.                                                                                                             |
| Medium-term outcomes                                            | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to higher education | – Four sources of evidence provided data to demonstrate that masterclasses can have a <b>positive</b> impact on the likelihood of a learner applying to university. These findings mirror previous evidence. Nearly three-fifths of participants (58%) in one average empirical evaluation 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they were likely to apply to higher education after a masterclass.              |

### Key findings and new insights on the impact of skills and attainment workshops

- The majority of new evidence (six out of eight) supports the finding that **skills and attainment workshops** can have a positive impact across a variety of short- and

medium-term outcomes. The other two sources report mixed results, with interventions benefitting some learners and not others. However, these evaluations do not identify what underlying variables may affect these outcomes.

- The call provided more compelling evidence about the role of skills and attainment workshops in developing **interpersonal skills and attributes**. The new studies add to this evidence. They suggest that these interventions can have a positive impact by enhancing **motivation** and **self-confidence**.
- No new evidence has evaluated the impact of skills and attainment workshops on **attainment**.

Table 7: Evidence of the impact of skills and attainment workshops

| Short-term outcomes                                                                               | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Development of interpersonal skills and attributes                                                | – Most of the new evidence (five out of six sources) suggests that workshops have a <b>positive</b> influence on the development of interpersonal skills and attributes. This adds to the extensive evidence on this outcome.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Development of subject knowledge/study skills                                                     | – The evidence from this call shows that workshops can also have a <b>positive</b> impact on the development of subject knowledge and study skills. Two studies add to this body of evidence. They suggest that workshops can aid the development of revision skills, along with other skills such as writing, time management and technical skills (e.g. music production skills).                                                                                                                                   |
| Increased knowledge of the higher education offer, how to apply, and the cost of higher education | – Most of the existing combined evidence suggested that skills and attainment workshops can also have a <b>positive</b> effect on learners' knowledge of the higher education offer and the associated benefits. One new study (average empirical) provides further evidence that workshops can have a <b>positive</b> effect on these areas of knowledge, including how to apply through UCAS. It also provides evidence that the workshop <b>improved</b> learners' understanding of the costs of higher education. |
| Increased confidence to make informed choices                                                     | – The existing combined body of evidence showed that workshops can <b>positively</b> impact on learners' confidence to make informed decisions. Of the four new pieces of evidence, two demonstrate <b>positive</b> impacts and two report more <b>mixed</b> findings.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Medium-term outcomes                                                                              | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to higher education                                   | – Previous evidence showed that workshops can have a <b>positive</b> impact on learners' intentions towards higher education. A new average empirical study found that 50% of learners were more likely to agree that they intended to progress onto higher education in the future following a workshop.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

## Mentoring

Mentoring is an activity with repeat interactions and sustained engagement designed to achieve a range of outcomes. It involves a dedicated relationship between a mentor and one or more student mentees. Activities can be delivered face-to-face or online. Findings are differentiated between face-to-face and online/blended modes of delivery.

### Face-to-face mentoring

Figure 6: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of face-to-face mentoring (number of new sources in parentheses).

|                  |           |                             |         |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|---------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    |                             |         |          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The evidence suggests that after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, partnerships resumed face-to-face mentoring.</li> <li>– Four new sources of empirical evidence on the impact of mentoring were submitted.</li> <li>– The evidence for face-to-face mentoring remains strong, but in the absence of causal evidence, outcomes are not attributable.</li> </ul> |
|                  | Empirical | 4(1)                        | 10(2)   | 6(1)     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                  | Narrative | 2                           | 1       |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                  |           | Weaker                      | Average | Stronger |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                  |           | <b>Strength of evidence</b> |         |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

### Key findings and new insights

- The four empirical sources submitted in this call vary in strength, but all show face-to-face mentoring can have a positive impact on learners' knowledge of the **benefits of higher education** and their **likelihood of applying**.
- The evidence submitted supports the view that face-to-face mentoring can have a positive effect on the development of learners' **interpersonal skills**, particularly self-confidence. One strong empirical source found that learners improved their ability to work in teams and enhanced their communication skills through their mentoring intervention.
- Previous evidence demonstrates the potential impact of mentoring on **attainment** through the development of learners' subject knowledge and written communication skills. However, none of the new sources evaluated the link between mentoring and attainment raising.

Table 8: Evidence of the impact of face-to-face mentoring activities

| Short-term outcomes                                             | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased knowledge of the benefits of higher education         | – Two new pieces of evidence show that face-to-face mentoring is <b>positively</b> associated with an increase in knowledge and awareness of higher education and the benefits of pursuing higher education courses.                                                                                          |
| Increased knowledge of student life                             | – Previous calls for evidence suggested that face-to-face mentoring can <b>enhance</b> learners’ knowledge of the different aspects of student life. No sources of evidence submitted in this latest round evaluated this outcome.                                                                            |
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices        | – The new evidence adds to the evidence that mentoring is associated with an <b>increase</b> in learners’ confidence in their decision-making abilities.                                                                                                                                                      |
| Development of interpersonal skills and attributes              | – One new strong empirical source shows that mentoring has a <b>positive</b> impact on communication skills, particularly ‘presenting key ideas and information’.                                                                                                                                             |
| Development of subject knowledge/study skills                   | – Previous evidence showed that mentoring could influence attainment by improving subject knowledge and written communication skills. No sources in this call evaluated attainment raising or the potential link with improvements in skills and knowledge.                                                   |
| Medium-term outcomes                                            | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to higher education | – Three new pieces of evidence show that mentoring has a <b>positive</b> impact on the likelihood of learners applying to higher education. One strong empirical study reports a 27% increase in the proportion of learners wanting to study at higher education as a result of their face-to-face mentoring. |

### Online/blended mentoring

Figure 7: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of online mentoring (number of new sources in parentheses).

|                  |           |                             |         |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|---------|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    | 1                           |         |          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Three new pieces of empirical evidence evaluated the impact of online/blended mentoring.</li> <li>– These new studies add limited weight to the existing evidence as two out of the three are of weaker strength.</li> </ul> |
|                  | Empirical | 6(2)                        | 9(1)    | 4        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                  | Narrative |                             | 1       |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                  |           | Weaker                      | Average | Stronger |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                  |           | <b>Strength of evidence</b> |         |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

## Key findings and new insights

- Earlier evidence suggested that online mentoring could be less impactful than face-to-face mentoring. The evidence submitted in this call shows online/blended mentoring generally has positive impacts on a number of short- and medium-term outcomes.
- There is evidence in this call that online/blended mentoring has a positive impact on learners' **confidence to make informed choices**, which adds to the existing strong body of evidence for this outcome. New evidence on the impact of online/blended mentoring on the development of **interpersonal skills** report improvements in learners' self-confidence, resilience and coping skills.
- Previous calls for evidence found varied and mixed findings in relation to learners' **intentions towards higher education**. None of the new sources of evidence evaluated this outcome, so the evidence remains mixed.

Table 9: Evidence of the impact of online/blended mentoring activities

| Short-term outcomes                                                  | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased knowledge of the higher education offer and how to apply   | – One new average empirical study finds that learners <b>increased</b> their knowledge of the application process and felt confident to prepare an application to higher education following an online/blended mentoring programme. This supports previous evidence that showed online/blended mentoring can increase learners' knowledge of the application process. |
| Increased knowledge of the benefits of higher education              | – One average empirical evaluation of the impact of online/blended mentoring on other aspects of knowledge about higher education, including the benefits and student life provides <b>mixed</b> results.                                                                                                                                                             |
| Increased knowledge of student life and the cost of higher education | – While mentees' knowledge of student finance and how the system works <b>increased</b> , there was <b>no improvement</b> in their understanding of what student life is like (average empirical).                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices             | – Two new pieces of evidence show that online/blended mentoring can have a <b>positive</b> impact on learners' confidence to make informed choices. This corroborates existing evidence on this outcome.                                                                                                                                                              |
| Development of interpersonal skills and attributes                   | – The new evidence suggests that online/blended mentoring can have a <b>positive</b> influence on learners' self-confidence, resilience and coping skills. This further adds strength to the results of the last meta-review that challenged earlier <b>mixed</b> conclusions about its impact on interpersonal skills and attributes.                                |
| Attainment raising                                                   | – Two pieces of evidence submitted in the last round showed a <b>positive</b> impact on attainment. There were no submissions in this call that addressed attainment raising, so the amount of evidence relating to this outcome remains low in volume.                                                                                                               |



| Medium-term outcomes                                            | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to higher education | – Previous calls provided <b>mixed</b> evidence that online/blended mentoring can increase the likelihood of learners applying to higher education. However, none of the new sources evaluated this outcome, so the evidence remains weak and inconclusive. |

## Campus visits

Learners visit a university campus for a tour where they meet university students and staff and find out about university. This category includes activities related to higher education on a further education campus.

Figure 8: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of campus visits (number of new sources in parentheses).

|                             |           |        |         |          |
|-----------------------------|-----------|--------|---------|----------|
| Type of evidence            | Causal    |        |         |          |
|                             | Empirical | 7      | 6(4)    | 4(3)     |
|                             | Narrative | 1      | 1       |          |
|                             |           | Weaker | Average | Stronger |
| <b>Strength of evidence</b> |           |        |         |          |

- The evidence suggests that campus visits resumed after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. There has been an increase in the volume of evidence on the impact of this intervention as a result.
- All evidence submitted is empirical and of average or stronger quality.

## Key findings and new insights

- The cumulative evidence base, including six out of seven new pieces of evidence, demonstrates the positive impacts of campus visits across a range of short-term outcomes.
- Three of new submissions indicate an increase in **intentions to apply to higher education**, following the intervention.
- Six out of the seven new submissions are based on mixed methods approaches, including pre-post surveys. This strengthens the existing evidence base, which is largely based on the results of a single method and post-intervention only surveys.

Table 10: Evidence of the impact of campus visits

| Short-term outcomes                                                  | Impacts achieved                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Increased knowledge of student life and the cost of higher education | – Supporting the findings of the existing evidence, the latest submissions demonstrate a <b>positive</b> shift in learners' self-reported knowledge of student life and other aspects of higher education, particularly student finance and the range of courses on offer. |
| Increased knowledge of the benefits of higher education              | – Five out of the seven studies which measure the impact of campus visits on learners' understanding of the benefits of higher education find a <b>positive</b> effect.                                                                                                    |
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices             | – Previous evidence suggested that campus visits were a particularly <b>effective</b> way to equip learners with knowledge about where to find information about higher education, which                                                                                   |

|                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                 | ensures their decisions are well-informed. This is further supported by the evidence submitted in the most recent call.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Development of interpersonal skills and attributes              | – Campus visits can <b>positively</b> impact on some learners' confidence. One strong empirical source reports that learners' confidence <b>increased</b> after working in a group setting. Those who took part in the campus visit also report feeling more confident about the steps they need to take to study for a degree and are <b>more likely</b> to agree that 'higher education is for people like me'.         |
| Development of subject knowledge/ study skills                  | – As in previous calls, there is no evidence that campus visits impact on subject knowledge. However, a strong empirical source reports that a session on study and revision skills delivered on campus had a <b>positive</b> impact on learners                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Medium-term outcomes</b>                                     | <b>Impacts achieved</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Increased intentions/likelihood of applying to higher education | – Two studies provide evidence that campus visits may have a <b>positive</b> impact on learners' intentions to apply to higher education. One average empirical source shows that the impact is stronger for Year 11 students compared to other year groups. This differs from previous evidence, which suggested that campus visits were more likely to influence younger learners' intentions towards higher education. |

## Staff development

This is an activity aimed at staff in higher education, schools and colleges where students are not directly involved.

Figure 9: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of staff development activities (number of new sources submitted in parentheses).

|                  |           |                             |         |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|---------|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of evidence | Causal    | 1                           |         |          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– No new pieces of evidence were submitted on the impact of staff development activities.</li> <li>– The overall volume and strength of evidence remains weak and limited conclusions can be drawn as a result.</li> </ul> |
|                  | Empirical | 1                           | 2       |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                  | Narrative |                             |         |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                  |           | Weaker                      | Average | Stronger |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                  |           | <b>Strength of evidence</b> |         |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

## Key findings

- Previous evidence showed that staff development activities can help improve staff knowledge of the higher education landscape and the UCAS application process, as well as their confidence to support learners with their higher education applications.

## Parents and carers

This category refers to activities aimed at parents/carers where students are not directly involved.

Figure 10: Number of sources and strength of evidence on the impact of parent/carer activities (number of new sources in parentheses).

| Type of evidence | Strength of evidence |         |          |
|------------------|----------------------|---------|----------|
|                  | Weaker               | Average | Stronger |
| Causal           |                      |         |          |
| Empirical        | 2                    | 1       |          |
| Narrative        |                      |         |          |

– No new pieces of evidence were submitted on the impact of interventions for parents/carers.

## Key findings

- Evidence submitted in previous calls has shown that activities targeted at parents/carers can have a positive influence on their knowledge of higher education and its potential benefits.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The evidence base on the impact of outreach activities delivered through Uni Connect has grown in volume, and in many cases strength, following the fifth call. This is likely to be a reflection of increased evaluation capacity within partnerships (a key aim of Uni Connect) and the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, which led to the resumption of face-to-face delivery and activities such as summer schools and campus visits, which many partnerships suspended during the pandemic. As a result, we can say with increasing confidence which interventions and modes of delivery contribute to the achievement of intermediate outcomes for learners.

The Theory of Change for Uni Connect is based on an assumption that supporting under-represented groups to develop their subject knowledge, interpersonal skills (such as communication) and attributes (such as confidence, self-efficacy, motivation and belief in their ability to study in higher education) will lead to higher rates of progression. Multi-intervention approaches are shown to have a positive impact on these outcomes, as well as the likelihood of a learner applying to higher education and the number of applications. Although few of the studies reviewed measure the impact of the specific elements of multi-intervention approaches, the body of evidence on the activities that commonly comprise such an intervention is growing. This insight into the outcomes that individual interventions achieve can be used to inform the design of multi-intervention approaches in the future. However, to ensure the 'right mix', further research into the impact of the different interventions on specific sub-groups is required. Despite the increase in the volume and quality of evidence overall, few sources disaggregate impact by specific sub-groups to elicit (with confidence) what works, for whom, in what context and why. There is also a limited focus on 'dosage', that is the number of hours and/or interventions required to produce positive outcomes.

The aims of Uni Connect are changing in Phase three to incorporate attainment raising alongside the provision of high quality, impartial IAG on the benefits of going to higher education. The evidence submitted by partnerships and reviewed to date suggests that all the different types of interventions can help to increase learners' knowledge of higher education and ensure their decisions are well-informed. However, evidence of the impact of Uni Connect on attainment is still relatively limited; 12 of the 83 sources reviewed measure the impact of specific interventions on attainment and half (six) report positive impact. However, it is important to note that much of this evidence explores impact on motivational and attitudinal factors that can contribute to higher attainment in the long term, rather than improvements in learners' grades. This is to be expected given attainment raising is an emerging priority for Uni Connect partnerships and key measures of attainment (e.g. GCSE and A-Level or equivalent grades) will not be available for some learners for a number of years. Consequently, it is still not possible to draw any firm conclusions about which interventions are most effective for raising attainment, although the emerging evidence points to subject masterclasses and skills and attainment workshops delivering some benefits in this regard.

## Recommendations to inform planning and delivery

Based on our analysis of the additional evidence received in response to this call and existing knowledge of ‘what works’, it is recommended that partnerships:

- Continue to deliver sustained and progressive outreach to under-represented groups through a coherent multi-intervention approach. The evidence shows that multi-intervention approaches are most effective for achieving short-, medium- and long-term outcomes, although further evidence on the ‘best mix’ of interventions is required.
- Regularly engage with young people to maximise the impact of Uni Connect. Overall level of engagement, rather than the number of different types of intervention engaged in, appears to be associated with more positive outcomes. More evidence is required to understand the optimum level of engagement needed to inform future planning and delivery.
- Prioritise in-person campus visits, summer schools and face-to-face mentoring (including as part of a blended approach) to maximise impact on learners’ knowledge and intentions towards higher education.
- Combine masterclasses and workshops with IAG to increase learner motivation and equip them with the subject knowledge, skills and attributes to support attainment raising in the longer term.

## Strengthening the evidence base

Despite the increase in the quality and volume of impact evaluation, there are still some gaps and weaknesses in the evidence base. There is currently limited robust ‘causal’ evidence that **attributes** outcomes to Uni Connect with certainty. Increasing the volume of causal evidence would strengthen the evidence base. However, these designs are difficult to implement in the context of a national programme where the targeting of interventions is flexible and there is a risk of ‘spillover’.<sup>22</sup> In this context, it is very challenging to randomly assign young people to ‘treatment’ (those who receive the intervention) and ‘control’ (those with the same characteristics who do not receive the intervention) groups for the purposes of running a randomised control trial or conducting quasi-experimental methods.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the evolving evidence base is comprised of predominantly empirical sources. The strongest empirical evidence is based on pre- and post-intervention analyses that demonstrate changes in outcomes and the characteristics associated with that change and draws on qualitative insights to understand how and why the changes have been achieved.

More evidence is needed on what works at different phases of the learner journey and for specific groups of learners. Differences in outcomes by age are often easier

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<sup>22</sup> When non-recipients of the intervention indirectly benefit from it.

<sup>23</sup> Please refer to our review of the methods for establishing the impact of Uni Connect at the programme level, available at [Independent evaluation of Uni Connect's impact on outcomes](#), for the challenges of implementing quasi-experimental methods, and our [blog](#) highlighting the challenges of running randomised control trials in conjunction with partnerships in Phase one.

to measure than differences by dimensions such gender, looked after status, and ethnicity because the number of participants in these sub-groups is often too small for the purposes of analysis. However, it is still important to recognise that outreach activities should not be a one-size fits all approach. More research is needed that seeks to identify the differences between sub-groups and how characteristics intersect and impact on young people's attitudes and behaviours towards higher education. This is particularly important for assessing 'risk' in the context of access and participation and ensuring activities are appropriately tailored according to local need.

Significant others, such as parents, carers and teachers, are widely acknowledged to have a significant influence on young people's choices about their future. Evidence on interventions for parents and carers and staff development is limited, and no additional sources were submitted in response to the fifth call. Developing key influencers' knowledge of the higher education landscape would help to build capacity to maximise and sustain the impacts of Uni Connect and achieve its objectives. Aligning Uni Connect more explicitly with national standards, such as the Gatsby benchmarks, could help to achieve buy-in to the programme in the longer term.

## **Recommendations to inform future evaluation**

Through their local evaluation, it is recommended that partnerships:

- Continue to prioritise the analysis of the impacts of interventions on different sub-groups to understand the differences and needs and to establish the optimum 'mix' of activities as part of a sustained and coherent programme.
- Evaluate the 'dosage effect' to establish the optimum number of hours and types of interventions required to achieve positive outcomes. Currently there is not enough evidence to say with certainty how many sessions of each type of activity are needed to produce a positive effect.
- Further explore how attitudinal and motivational factors influence learners' attainment and intentions towards higher education at different stages of their educational journey to ensure interventions such as workshops and masterclasses are appropriately tailored and have impact.
- Consider how national administrative data could be used to develop robust methods for evaluating the impact of Uni Connect on attainment raising.
- Continue to track learners to establish whether positive impacts are sustained in the longer term and lead to progression to higher education.
- Continue to implement pre- and post-intervention data collection, and experimental and quasi-experimental methods where appropriate, to further strengthen the evidence base and establish impact that can be attributed to an intervention.



## **Recommendation for the access and participation sector**

Although these recommendations are primarily targeted at Uni Connect partnerships, the learning and insight are also relevant to wider stakeholders in the access and participation sector. Furthermore, wider stakeholders can now access the Evidence Bank that has been collated over five years on the effectiveness of different outreach interventions and their impact on outcomes for learners. It is, therefore, recommended that stakeholders use this evidence to inform their strategic and operational approaches to access and participation. In particular, higher education providers should draw on the evidence to identify interventions that are most likely to achieve the outcomes required to address institutional priorities for access and participation and inform the development of access and participation plans in the context of the proposed new risk-based approach. Insight from the Evidence Bank should also be used to support knowledge exchange between partnerships and institutions on best practice in access and participation.

## Annex 1: Methods of analysis

Table 11: Classification of standards of evidence

| Type 1: Narrative                                                                        |                                                     | Type 2: Empirical enquiry (includes criteria for Type 1 and the following) |                                          | Type 3: Causal claims (includes criteria for Type 2 and the following) |                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Yes                                                                                      | No                                                  | Yes                                                                        | No                                       | Yes                                                                    | No                                   |
| Coherent strategy                                                                        | Disjointed activities                               | Clear aims of what activities seek to achieve                              | Aims developed after activity            | Have a target and control/comparison group                             | Using groups that are not comparable |
| Approach and activities underpinned by evidence from literature and/or other evaluations | No rationale for developing approach and activities | Select indicators of impact                                                | No concept of measuring success          | Use of an experimental or quasi-experimental design                    | Selection bias in comparator groups  |
| Shared understanding of processes involved                                               | The model of change is not shared                   | Quantitative and/or qualitative data                                       | Information not systematically collected | Think about selection bias and how to avoid it                         |                                      |
| Reasons for activity                                                                     | Ad hoc activities                                   | Pre- and post-activity data (minimum of two time points)                   | Only collect information once            |                                                                        |                                      |
| Clear conception of why the changes sought to make are important                         | No understanding of needs of target group           | Analysis competently undertaken                                            | Data not related to the intervention     |                                                                        |                                      |
| Programme reviews                                                                        | No review of evaluation                             | Sharing of results and review of activity                                  | Results not used to inform decisions     |                                                                        |                                      |

The evidence was coded using a framework aligned to criteria developed by TASO as part of its evidence review. In addition to the standard of evidence and overall quality score, the following information was recorded for each source of evidence.

Figure 11: Coding framework

- Partnership
- Date and timeframe for evaluation
- Format of material
- Activity type and description
- Length and intensity of activity
- Mode of activity delivery
- Target group
- Outcomes evaluated
- Type of evaluation approach
- Rationale for approach
- Data collection methods
- Total number of participants in intervention
- Total number of participants in evaluation sample
- Total number of respondents and response rate
- Attrition rate (pre- and post-activity studies)
- Data analysis
- Results
- Impact achieved
- Notes on demonstrable impact
- Challenges/limitations of evaluation

## Annex 2: Map of outcomes to interventions

The figure overleaf illustrates the **volume** of evidence submitted in response to the **fifth call** that demonstrates whether an intervention does (or does not) contribute to short-, medium- and long-term outcomes for learners. This figure is based on the totality of evidence submitted. The blue dots depicts where the evidence about the impact of an intervention is overwhelmingly positive, that is when over 75% of all sources report positive findings. The orange dots signal where evidence is more mixed, that is some positive and some negative and/or less conclusive. In the main body of this report, the evidence is presented in tables for each intervention is based on the most **robust sources**. This figure is designed to be used alongside the Evidence Bank, which provides further details on the strength of the evidence and the nature of the impact detected. In this figure, a large amount of evidence equates to more than 10 pieces, a moderate amount as five to nine pieces, and a small amount as fewer than five pieces of evidence.

|                                                                         | Multi-intervention | Summer schools | IAG | Subject masterclasses | Skills & attainment | Mentoring | Campus Visits | Staff | Parents/carers |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------|---------------|-------|----------------|
| Increased knowledge of higher education offer and how to apply          | ●                  |                | ●   |                       | ●                   | ●         | ●             |       |                |
| Increased knowledge of student life                                     | ●                  | ●              | ●   |                       |                     | ●         | ●             |       |                |
| Increased knowledge of the cost of higher education and finance options | ●                  | ●              | ●   |                       | ●                   | ●         | ●             |       |                |
| Increased understanding of the benefits of higher education             | ●                  | ●              | ●   |                       | ●                   | ●         | ●             |       |                |
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices                | ●                  | ●              | ●   | ●                     | ●                   | ●         | ●             |       |                |
| Development of interpersonal skills                                     | ●                  | ●              | ●   | ●                     | ●                   | ●         | ●             |       |                |
| Development of subject knowledge/study skills                           | ●                  |                | ●   | ●                     | ●                   | ●         | ●             |       |                |
| Attainment raising                                                      | ●                  |                |     |                       |                     |           | ●             |       |                |
| Increased intentions/likelihood to apply to higher education            | ●                  | ●              | ●   | ●                     | ●                   | ●         | ●             |       |                |
| Increased number of applications/offers/acceptances to higher education | ●                  |                |     |                       |                     |           |               |       |                |

● Positive impact – large amount of evidence

● Positive impact – moderate amount of evidence

● Positive impact – small amount of evidence

● Mixed, negative or no impact – small amount of evidence

● Mixed, negative or no impact – moderate amount of evidence

● Mixed, negative or no impact – large amount of evidence

## Map of evidence of positive outcomes to interventions (all calls)

The table below illustrates the **volume** of evidence that has been submitted in response to **all five calls** that demonstrates each intervention has a **positive impact** on learner outcomes. The numbers relate to the actual number of sources of evidence in the Evidence Bank. The cells have been colour coded to highlight where the largest (and smallest) amount of positive evidence exists.

|                                                                         | Multi-intervention | Summer schools | IAG | Subject masterclasses | Skills & attainment workshops | Mentoring | Campus Visits | Staff Development | Parents/carers |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-----|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Increased knowledge of higher education offer and how to apply          | 31                 | 7              | 29  | 5                     | 5                             | 18        | 1<br>1        | 1                 | 2              |
| Increased knowledge of student life                                     | 10                 | 9              | 4   | 1                     |                               | 2         | 8             |                   |                |
| Increased knowledge of the cost of higher education and finance options | 18                 | 5              | 9   | 1                     | 1                             | 3         | 5             | 1                 |                |
| Increased understanding of the benefits of higher education             | 21                 | 4              | 6   | 2                     | 1                             | 4         | 9             |                   |                |
| Increased confidence in ability to make informed choices                | 24                 | 6              | 28  | 5                     | 5                             | 17        | 6             |                   | 1              |
| Development of interpersonal skills                                     | 30                 | 7              | 5   | 5                     | 14                            | 21        | 7             |                   |                |
| Development of subject knowledge/study skills                           | 10                 | 3              | 7   | 6                     | 9                             | 5         | 2             |                   |                |
| Attainment raising                                                      | 8                  | 1              |     |                       | 2                             | 3         |               |                   |                |
| Increased intentions/likelihood to apply to higher education            | 34                 | 3              | 19  | 10                    | 9                             | 12        | 8             |                   |                |
| Increased number of applications/offers/acceptances to higher education | 12                 |                |     |                       |                               | 1         |               |                   |                |

- Positive impact – large amount of evidence (>20 sources)
- Positive impact – moderate amount of evidence (10-19 sources)
- Positive impact – small amount of evidence (0-9 sources)